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INFO RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 0169
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DEPT. PLEASE PASS TO ALL SOUTH ASIAN COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2011

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: SPOT REPORT - RUMORS OF A COUP

Classified By: CDA Peter W. Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. On September 24, Pakistan was abuzz with (unfounded) rumors of a coup against President Musharraf, who was away on official travel in the United States. Cell phones and text messages allowed the rumor to quickly spread and many Government of Pakistan (GOP) and Embassy officials were fielding calls on reports of the coup. In the end, reports of the coup were verified to be false, but the whole situation shed light into how susceptible the Pakistani public are in believing rumors. End summary.

12. (SBU) Rumors of a coup started around 2:00 pm on a weekend, with government offices closed. The circumstances on September 24 were ideal for a rumor of a coup to start: there were large-scale power outages throughout the country, with some places being without power for 12 hours; President Musharraf was out of the country in the U.S. and was unexpectedly undergoing medical examinations in Texas; Pakistani state television, PTV, was off the air for a few hours; and the recent military coup in Thailand was fresh in people's minds. Some people had interpreted the nationwide power outages and PTV going off the air (which also occurred during the 1999 coup) as evidence that the military had taken over in President Musharraf's absence. By late afternoon, Pakistanis inside and outside the country were busily trying to reach anyone who might be in the know to verify reports of a military coup.

13. (SBU) Embassy officers and FSNs started receiving inquiries on coup rumors a little past 3:00 pm. One Embassy official reported that her golfing partners, a former GOP official and his wife, were receiving dozens of phone calls and text messages trying to confirm reports of a military coup. An Embassy FSN repeatedly received phone calls from throughout Punjab asking him if it was true that military helicopters were circling Islamabad and tanks were rolling down the streets of the capital. Others received messages from as far away as Karachi and Quetta. Other diplomatic missions in Islamabad also received similar inquiries.

14. (U) By the early evening, the Embassy had confirmed from a variety of official sources that no coup had taken place. Later in the evening, news bulletins featured GOP officials who publicly denied any coup.

15. (C) Comment: The speed with which the coup rumor spread and was believed speaks to the penchant for conspiracy theories and juicy rumors in Pakistan as well as the power of cell phones and text messages. As Pakistan moves closer to elections in late 2007/early 2008, it is likely that more rumors of coups will appear. End comment.

BODDE